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Sermon on the Epistle for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity.

EPH. 3, 13—21.

On a certain occasion Jesus, who was a-hungred, saw a fig tree in the way. He went to it, expecting to find figs thereon, but found only leaves. Disappointed, He cursed that tree. "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever." And presently the fig tree withered away. At another time, in a parable, He sets forth the same truth. A certain man, etc., Luke 13, 6 f. And only at the instance of the dresser's intercession he consents to let it stand another year, to see whether it will bear or not. Jesus expected to find fruit on these trees. The purpose of the fig tree is to bear figs. For this reason the gardener plants it. Fruitless fig trees are a cumbrance to the ground, and should be hewn down.—So it is with men and their religion. Man's faith is not to be without fruit, a dead thing, a cumbrance and burden to the heart. When the Lord passes by, examining such, He will find but leaves, large, lusty leaves, the things He cares not to see. He wants fruit. Our faith must be fruit-bearing. It is to be active and must be seen in works of love and charity. The psalmist compares the true believer to a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. And John the Baptist, reproving the scribes and Pharisees and those that wrongfully deck themselves with the name Christian, says: "Now also the ax," etc., Luke 3, 9. Why cumber the ground, ye fruitless trees? The hissing ax of God's wrath will cut you down, and you will be cast into the fire, fuel for hell!

Having shown the great urgency of being a fruit-bearing Christian, a believer that does good works, I pass on to tell you that we have need of *increasing* in this to retain what we have. It is a common law on this earth to grow and increase. The striving and

toiling and wrestling and worrying and running of the wicked is to increase his goods, to accumulate and heap together all he can. He believes there is strength in it. He says within himself: The more I have the stronger I am. He longs, you see, to grow. The animal kingdom is told to be fruitful and multiply, and to fill the earth; and throughout this kingdom we see the growth and increase of every species. Jesus, to unburden the anxious, careworn child of God, points him to the plants of the earth, saying: "Behold the lilies of the field, how they grow!" See, they do not worry and fret, and yet they become larger and richer in glory and beauty, surpassing even a Solomon amidst his palatial splendors. To man a like word is given: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." Is the Christian alone, as some so vainly imagine, to stand still, and not grow in Christianity, in faith, in spirituality, and everything precious? No; the Christian is told: "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." It is of such spiritual growth that our epistle speaks. May God's Spirit bless our meditation upon this subject!

SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

1. *Its necessity;*
2. *Its manner;*
3. *Its effects.*

1.

Paul has stated to the believers at Ephesus how he has preached the Gospel unto them and evangelized them as God had purposed it before the foundation of the world. In one of the first verses of this epistle he shows them their election and predestination unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. He declared the Gospel, and they were turned from sin unto righteousness which is in Christ Jesus. He tells them what a blessing there has been bestowed upon them. Once they were blind, without hope, and without God in this world, but now, since they have received the Gospel, they are blessed indeed; for by faith in Christ they have "boldness and access with confidence," *i. e.*, free and unrestricted access to God, as children to a father. Through the mediatorial death of Christ, God's wrath against sin is appeased, and every obstacle and hindrance that lay between God and man and denied them access to God's heart is removed. But now, says the apostle, there is the arduous yet sweet task to *remain* in this state, to increase and grow, lest they wander back into the unhappy realms and the dark abyss from which they have come forth. Yes, it is a necessity for them to be careful of this.

And they are to be so on account of the dangerous circumstances that they are in. "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you." The peril of desponding over the state

of the church was not small then. Their head and leader, whom God had chosen to bring them the Gospel, lay in chains at the capital of the Roman empire, awaiting the death summons from a cruel ruler. Him, of whom they had heard the precious Word of Life that quickened their souls, they were to see no more. Tribulations of all kinds had come to him from many sources; his sufferings and grievances, sorrows and afflictions were known to them. No doubt, there were wicked hearts and cruel tongues to distill their poison in words like these: "Is that the Christian religion? What kind of a merciful Father have you if He permits His apostle to lie bound in chains at Rome, to have him endure so many things? Your religion is a queer thing, a delusion!" Such and the like scorn would be cast at them. How necessary, then, from the arising circumstances that the Christians should grow in strength and increase, that they might stand against the fiery darts of the wicked. Jesus points to the necessity of a lasting, increasing faith in this state when speaking to us in the parable of the sower. "He that received the seed," etc., Matt. 13, 20 f. He stumbles, falls, and turns from the truth. Ah, then, 'tis necessary for you to grow!

This same verse teaches us also that all believers in Jesus Christ must suffer. They that will live godly must suffer persecution, say the Scriptures. In one way or another it will come: to the one, misfortune in his work; to another, a sick body; to a third, sickness in his family; to a fourth, the contempt of a wicked generation, and so on. Not only Paul, but also these Ephesians, as well as all others, are to know that a distinguishing mark of a follower of Jesus Christ is the cross, for "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." So plain is this that the apostle will have it understood that those who are not enduring suffering should be careful lest they become unbelievers! If tribulation be general for the godly, it is a great wish of the apostle that we faint not, do not grow weary, low-spirited, melancholy, gloomy, or sad because of the sufferings of this present time. To avoid this, Christians must firmly cling to their God, walk close to Him, let His Word be a lamp, the only lamp, unto their feet, and the light and guiding star of their conduct. What is this but growing in spirituality and holiness? In fact, this is the very object of tribulation of all kinds: it makes us better Christians, it leaves us with a stronger faith and better knowledge of the truth. People consider it a hard thing, shameful, hurtful to happiness; it is not. Though it be contrary to the worldling's pleasure, it is a glory to the Christian, as our text says: "Do not faint at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." For the Ephesians it was a glory that the apostle who had brought them the Gospel and had been the blessed means of their conversion was now in bonds and distress. To glory

in this and not be offended, needs a strong, unwavering faith in the promises of our God. Growth is necessary.

How necessary a growth in faith and grace is we may gather also from the fervent prayer the apostle sends to heaven for the believers. "For this cause I bow . . . in the inner man." He implores God on bended knee that He may strengthen the Christians in the inner man, that is, the new man. If the apostle so sincerely and entreatingly beseeches God for strength, it truly must be needed. And so it is. It is a general need, something that we all not only can use, but must have, strength in the inner man. We go to church, we hear God's Word, we meditate upon it, we study it, we search the Scriptures, we pray—what is this all for but for edification, to build up and be nourished up in the true faith? They are means to this one end: growth in faith. They all are proofs of its undeniable necessity!

I cannot understand how strength, growth, and increase in faith and Christianity should not be needed. You will cast a seed of a flower or pulse in your garden and expect it to grow. The farmer plants his grain, not that it should lay waste in the ground, but that it should grow up. Nursery men put out trees, not that they remain the same size, but increase. You go to school, take instruction in this branch or that, not that you stay as ignorant as at the beginning, but that your knowledge be increased. You work to add to what you have. All around you, you find the workings of this law. Shall it not also be a necessity for you to grow in faith? I do not say that these examples are in any way analogous to spiritual growth, they are simply to show the naturalness of it.

Almighty God, Thy Word is cast
Like seed into the ground;
Now let the dew of heaven descend,
And righteous fruits abound.

Yea, you cannot subsist without it. What becomes of the grain that does not grow up? It is either destroyed by animals or it rots. What is the matter with a tree that has not grown for several years? It is dead. Water that stands still stagnates and is noxious to palate and nostril. There is no standing still, my friend. It is either advance or retreat, growth or decay. Look at your body! Physiologists tell us that man's vitality increases until it reaches a certain year, when it begins to decrease; as soon as the one ceases the other sets in. If you are not ascending, you are descending; there is no standstill, no stopping, as sure as time moves on. So it is in spiritual life. If you are not growing in grace, you are wilting, yea, perhaps already a dead tree. How sweet the prayer, then, of the apostle that the Christian may be strengthened in the inner man! Ah, there is a tremendous necessity with you!

2.

Now, behold how it is done. God is the Author of all spiritual growth. For this reason He is called "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and through Christ He has become our Father. He it is that strengthens us, after whom all things in heaven and earth are named. He does it according to the riches of His glory and grace. The Scriptures commend God's grace towards man as abundant and unlimited and unsearchable, that He takes pleasure in bestowing it on those that ask Him. He is gracious to those that trust in Him. And it is *solely* His grace that does it, not one part God and the other man. No more than the man that sows the seed can make it grow, no more than the man that plants the tree can give it strength to become large—no more can man by his own strength grow in grace or be strengthened. *God* strengthens the believer.

Paul's prayer runs, that he bends his knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He would grant the Christians at Ephesus grace to be strengthened. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." And He gives strength by His Spirit. To receive strength of ourselves means weakness and collapse. But to beseech God for it, as the apostle does, insures true growth unto us, yea, a strong, vigorous growth that will not be as the gourd, which grows one day and wilts the next, but as the oak, which scorns the blast of the tempest. He grants such strength by the Spirit. Remember that the Holy Spirit is not given you independently of the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. It is in them He dwells, and it is through them He is given, and through them He operates and works in us. To claim to possess the Spirit and strength by the same outside and apart from the Word is fanaticism; for "as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby." Growth is assured by the Word, the hearing of it, not neglecting it at public worship. Christians must be good church-goers and users of the Sacraments. To go to church one Sunday and then be absent two is not desiring the sincere milk of the Word, and hence is not assuring us growth. Neglecting to take the Sacrament a whole year or longer is certainly not praying for strength in the inner man by God's Spirit.

The Spirit enables us to have Christ dwell in our hearts by faith, that we cling to Him more and more, so that He is our one and all. Christ is to live in us, that by faith we can cheerfully say: "His righteousness is mine, His obedience to the Law was for me; in every way He is my Savior!" The whole Christ is to dwell in us, not only as the positive Redeemer from sin, but also as the

great Example which we should follow, that we may be true followers of Him in all of His precious virtues. If Christ dwell in us by faith, then we are strong!

True strength, further, calls for our being rooted and grounded in love. Our love towards God and man should be deeply cast into our hearts. As the roots of a tree run into all parts of the surrounding earth, so should our love be in us; yea, as the root gives stability to the tree, so our love should establish our faith in Christ. Thus our charity is a sign of strength. We should rest upon this foundation; for "faith without works is dead, being alone." We are to be immovable in love. Many are the passages which teach us this. If Christ dwell in our hearts by faith and we be rooted and grounded in love, the prayer of the apostle is granted—we are strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, we are growing in grace.

3.

It yet remains to show some of the blessed effects. The first effect is, by growth and strength we receive a greater knowledge and deeper comprehension of the wonderful counsel of God pertaining to our salvation. We can begin to look into that grand mystery which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes (neither the learned) of this world knows, as it is written: "Eye hath not seen," etc., 1 Cor. 2, 9. And the more we are strengthened the greater the knowledge of this blessed mystery, by which we have salvation. We shall be able to "comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height;" we shall begin to fathom what reason with all its means can in no wise reach; and so we shall "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." The learned and wise of this world can never reach unto this subject, the love of Christ. It reaches away beyond them, exceeds them by far, so that it dumfounds them. But the believer that has felt this love as it moved his heart knows the same, and growing in strength means advancing in this knowledge. How blessed an effect this is!

Another effect is, we shall be "filled with all the fullness of God." The fullness of God fills us; we shall be filled with God. All grace and spiritual gifts will be abundantly lavished upon us. His Spirit will give us strength, will enlighten us, and His life will live in us, His salvation save us, His love create love in us. In short, all that God is able to do will be perfected in us and effectually wrought, so that we shall be edified, not only having a part of God, but His very fullness and plenitude. What the psalmist says of those to whom the Word of God came will be fulfilled in you: "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High!" Grand effect of growing in faith!

Finally, it will evoke praise and adoration. In a doxology unsurpassable in beauty the apostle gives all glory to Him "that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." He that believes and grows ascribes this work to Him that is able to do all things, things that we would not think of nor ask for. Since He is the Omnipotent One, unto Him belongs all glory by those that are in Christ, now and forevermore. All praise to Him on earth, all glory to Him in heaven; yea, "glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." O glorious effect!

Behold the necessity, the manner, and the effects of true spiritual growth! It exhorts all of you to be strengthened by God's Spirit in the inner man, knowing that he that grows not is wasting, dying, and perishing in some sin. For not to go from strength to strength is to retreat. Stand fast, O Christian, in the love of your Savior, and in the power of His might, which is the only true strength. Move onward, forward, upward! "Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever! Amen." F. W. ADAMS, *contr. by O. K.*

Sermon on the Gospel for the Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.

MATT. 22, 34—46.

In the early centuries of the Christian Church many dissensions arose concerning the person and office of Jesus Christ. Some still argue: It is useless to know who and what Christ was; it matters little whether one believes in His deity or not, as long as one believes Christ's doctrine, and those quarrels of former centuries should not be repeated to-day. Some endeavor to hide their denial of their Master by some such phrase as this: "We believe in Jesus, and not in something about Jesus." Now, it is impossible to believe in a person, whether human or divine, except by believing something about him. He who believes in a physician believes that he has knowledge and skill in his profession. If you believe in a merchant, you believe he will not deceive you about the price and quality of his goods; and if the merchant believes in his customer, he believes

he will honestly pay his accounts. It is the same with belief in Jesus, and this is made plain by the confession itself; for in the Creed you confess that He is Christ and that He is God's and Mary's Son. There is much confusion in our day as to who Jesus really is. With all the demonstrations and testimonies and evidences of the ages, many in doubt and semi-skepticism are still asking, "Who is this?" That is an important question, for Christ Himself demands of us,

"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

Let us learn from our text, —

1. *Which answer the Pharisees once gave to this question;*
2. *Which answer Christ pointed out as the only correct one;*
3. *How important it is to answer this question correctly.*

1.

"What think ye of Christ?" What prompted the Master to ask thus? According to the 22d chapter of St. Matthew Sadducees, lawyers, scribes, and Pharisees were constantly debating with Christ. It was sickening to them to see how on Palm Sunday the multitudes had received Jesus with their joyous Hosannas. The proud prelates could not come to rest. Like wolves in sheep's clothing they roamed about, each with meekness on his lips, friendship in his countenance, but with deviltry in his heart. Jesus of Nazareth was an eye-sore to them. Jesus had just silenced the infidel Sadducees. The Pharisees were highly elated over this mortifying defeat of the Sadducees, but they begrudged Christ the triumph. And now they come forward to see whether they cannot bring that Nazarene to terms. One of their number, undoubtedly an authority on laws, is to ask the Master which is the foremost commandment of the Law. Christ points out the sum of the first and second tables. St. Mark relates that the inquirer granted that Jesus had answered correctly, and that Jesus said unto him, because He noticed that he spoke discreetly, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

Christ desires to lead this man on, as well as the others, and hence He reminds His cunning and guileful enemies of the one thing needful, in which all their thoughts should center, saying: "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?" They answer, "The son of David." Their reply is not altogether amiss. According to prophecy, David was to be the ancestor of Christ. Every Jew was well aware of that, and consequently the multitudes chanted the hymn upon His entrance into Jerusalem: "Hosanna to the son of David!" However, they would not allow that this Messiah was more than a man, even though He should be mightier and more illustrious than His forefather David. Some would say, Jesus is John the

Baptist; some, He is Elias, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets resurrected; in short, a man like any other. There were very few who believed as Mary, who, after she had been acquainted with the fact that she was to be the mother of Jesus, said of the Messiah: "My spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Savior." These dignitaries of the synagogue were blind leaders of the blind. Little and very carelessly they must have studied the Old Testament, for in more than one instance the Messiah of the Jews is called Jehovah, the Lord. God made manifest in the flesh is the keynote of the prophecies, the sweet burden of them all. But why should such self-centered men like these scribes and Pharisees, men blind to their sins, desire a Savior, long for salvation?

In the lapse of centuries different phrases may have been coined, but the world at large in its position over against Christ has not altered. If Christ were to come to-day and ask, "What think ye of Christ?" some, claiming to be of the number of His followers, would say unhesitatingly and without a blush, Christ is a man, "giving to the world for all times the great ideal of what it means to be a man."

The "new theology" of to-day is not new, it is the reiteration, the rehashing of the doctrines of scribes and Pharisees in Christ's day, of Arianism of the fourth century, and of German Rationalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This "new theology," like its prototypes, has robbed Christ of His deity and robbed Him in the plain garb of "the ideal man," "the super-man." One minister remarks from his pulpit, and hears no protest from his congregation, "I am glad reverently and humbly to call Him 'the Son of God,' for to me humanity at its highest and noblest and best is divinity." Another remarks: "Jesus Christ was divine, but so are we. Every man is a potential Christ, or, rather, a manifestation of the eternal Christ." Thus these men, pretendedly ambassadors of Jesus Christ, have eliminated, erased the sharp line of demarcation between Christ, the true God, and every mortal man, and declare every man to be more or less divine, a Christ to some degree, and Christ to be like every man, though of a little better clay. (Unitarianism, Christian Scientism.) The rant of the Jewish Pharisees seems tame and nerveless over against the shocking blasphemy of some of our present-day preachers, who decorate themselves with the name Christian.

Any such Jesus, who is not the only-begotten Son of God the Father, who wrought no miracles, who arose not from the dead, is as distinct from the real Jesus as all imaginary gods are from the eternal and only Jehovah. We will understand it more fully when we examine what answer Christ points out as the only correct one to the question, "What think ye of Christ?"

2.

The first question having been answered but partially by the overbearing enemies of Christ, Christ puts a second question: "How, then, doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool?" These men were still so honest as not to deny that David was the author of these words, quoted from the 110th Psalm. But our "higher critics" and "new theologians" do, despite the fact that in four instances in the New Testament these words are recorded as words of David. What is all testimony worth if anybody can, with a mere gesture of the hand, brush it away like so many cobwebs? Here we have testimony that Christ is Jehovah, is Lord, and Christ applies these words to Himself, asking, "If David, then, call Him Lord, how is He His Son?" No king is apt to call his son his lord. True, Christ is David's Lord; if He is David's Lord, He is David's God, who will not give His praise to graven images. This David's Lord is also human, for He is to sit at the right hand of the Father, till He make His enemies His footstool. According to His human nature, Christ, after His humiliation, was also highly exalted above all the heavens and above every name that is named in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. This, certainly, can only be said of His human nature, since His divine nature is immutable and is exalted to the highest possible state of exaltation from eternity. Here we have a very strong proof of the deity and humanity of Christ. He is both. He comes from Israel after the flesh, and at the same time is over all, God blessed forever. He, the man Christ, is the one God and one Mediator between God and man. As Christ ever and anon describes Himself as the son of man, so He emphasizes with equal force that He is the Son of God.

Let men assert: "There is no man in all human history that I should so wish to follow as that man, Christ. There is no life in all the range of lives that I should be prouder to have my life in some faint way resemble than that life. To be like Him, there is nothing higher, nothing nobler." Let men pretend honor towards Christ, all such high-sounding praise of Christ is but a very thin and flimsy gauze by which they cunningly strive to shield and hide their hideous mockery of Christ, when they deny His eternal Godhead. It is nothing but insult added to injury. For if Jesus publishes unto all the world that He is true God and true man in one person, if He demands, "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father; he that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him;" if in the presence of the sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews, asked by the high-priest as to His divine Sonship, if in that momentous hour when His life hinged upon an answer, He declares under oath that He is God's only-begotten Son and shall come to judge the quick and the dead; yea, if this all and still more has

been asserted by Him, then every denial of His deity implies that He deliberately spoke a falsehood every time He asserted it, and that He is guilty of rank perjury. How can men believe that Christ is not God's only Son, and yet claim that His ideals were the highest and noblest? How can an impostor and pretender, whose whole life is a lie, be a model and pattern? But would Christ not be an impostor if He were only human, and yet would claim to be David's Lord, Jehovah? I am nonplussed and dumfounded to hear clergymen claim devotion to, and reverence for, Christ, when at the same time they flatly accuse Him of being mistaken in His identity, of being a liar, a villainous perjurer. If I were impressed as they, I should fling Christ on the scrap-heap with Mohammed, Confucius, Brigham Young, Dowie, Mrs. Eddy, and other cheats and frauds. I know how horrible this sounds, and by the grace of God I am far from doing it. All I wish to emphasize as forcibly as I can, is what weeping Mary expressed in the words: "They have taken away my Lord."

3.

How important a correct or incorrect answer is to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" may be learned from the following lines:

What think ye of Christ? is the test
 To try both your state and your scheme;
 You cannot be right in the rest,
 Unless you think rightly of Him.
 As Jesus appears to your view,
 As He's apprehended or not,
 So God is disposed toward you,
 And mercy or wrath is your lot.

This may not be popular teaching, but it is biblical and irrefutable.

It is well to describe Christ's life and actions as "the supreme type of virtue and love." That is well enough as far as it goes, but it is not enough. If you do not believe that He is the Son of God, He declares that you shall die in your sins, your sins will be unforgiven, and you will be held accountable for the same in the hour of death and on the day of judgment. If you refuse to believe in His vicarious sacrifice for sin, refuse to believe that God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, then you may seemingly belong to the community of believers in His name, yet you are not one of them. It is claimed the largest canvas upon which a painting has been executed is Jan Styka's masterpiece, Golgotha, Christ on Calvary Hill, ready to die for the sins of the world. Thus the largest painting that has ever been executed upon the canvas of your mind and heart must be Christ in His deepest humiliation, being offered up as the Lamb of God on Mount Calvary. This must be the prime object of your meditation, this the most fascinating subject of your study and your interest. Yea, to believe Christ to be the very and

most exalted God, even though He is the most despised and dejected of men, that is the crucial test of your faith in Christ, or as old Simeon declared before his departure, thereby the thoughts of many are revealed. Refuse to believe that the Son of God died for all, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life, and Christ declares that such a one is condemned already. You are now, yea, even now, under the wrath of God and will ever be, if you remain in unbelief; believe in Him, then you have a Mediator with the Father, who intercedes for you, and whose blood crieth louder than Abel's; and He will give unto you life eternal.

In these days of unbelief nothing could be more important than a correct and biblical answer to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" Study this question, and let Scriptures answer the same for you. Blessed is he who is not offended at Christ, but receives Him in true faith, for of such He has said: "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." Amen.

OTTO C. A. BOECLER.

Funeral Sermon.

ROM. 8, 35—39.

Christians are often tempted to doubt the love of God. Especially the afflicted are, at times, moved to such doubts. They know that they are the chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; they know that it is their duty to show forth the praises of Him who has called them from darkness unto His marvelous light; they know that they must let their light so shine before men that they may see their good works and glorify their Father which is in heaven. If so, should not one think that Christians are free from that which befalls the children of this world? Should they not have the prerogative to be without temptations, afflictions, hardship, etc.? No, friends, to think thus is wrong. To suffer is the very nature of Christianity. Christians are called to endure afflictions, as Paul says: "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." But at the same time Christians can be positive that everything that befalls them comes from God, that His love abides with them, that they shall finally conquer, as we see from the words of our text. Accordingly, let us consider,

THAT CHRISTIANS HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT THE LOVE OF GOD IN THEIR MANIFOLD AFFLICTIONS.

For they know,

1. *That they must endure afflictions;*
2. *That they shall finally conquer.*

1.

Our text begins: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" These words were written by the Apostle Paul. He boldly and confidently proclaims that nothing is able to separate him and all true believers from God's love. But in making this bold assertion he, at the same time, presupposes that the Christians are not free from the assaults of their enemies, but that they must suffer them. And what it is that they must endure we see from our text. There the apostle asks: "Shall tribulation . . . the love of Christ?" Evidently the answer is, no. But all Christians are more or less assailed by them, as seen from the apostle's example.

Paul was called by Christ to proclaim God's Word to the Gentiles. He went about all Asia Minor, telling the people what Christ had done for them, gathering the converts and founding churches. While he was thus active in behalf of the kingdom of God, his enemies did not rest. They tried their very utmost to put as many obstacles in his way as they possibly could. Satan, the arch-enemy of God and all true believers, tried to turn him from faith, to deceive him, to make him waver. The ungodly world tempted him with its evil examples, offenses, and sinful habits. They persecuted and threatened to kill him. At different times he was called upon to justify himself before rulers and kings. He had to endure famine, distress, and nakedness, and he was exposed to many hardships. Yet in all these afflictions he did not doubt that God loved him. For when asking the question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" he wishes to answer, Nothing.

As Paul, so all Christians have more or less afflictions to endure. When God calls the Christians by the Gospel, He has various purposes in view. He calls them to holiness, to His marvelous light, to inherit a blessing, to eternal glory, but also to suffer, to endure afflictions. He says: "If any man," etc., Matt. 16, 24. "Whom the Lord loveth," etc., Hebr. 12, 6. The Christians must always bear in mind that where Christ is, there is the cross. He took the cross upon Himself during His pilgrimage on earth. The same He requires of His followers. He gave them a model, from which they are to copy. Being called by God, the Christians must abstain from that which is worldly, and turn to that which is godly. Therefore it is self-evident that the world hates those who do not run with it to the same excess of riot. They are like sheep among the wolves, continually exposed to the greatest perils. But at the same time the Christians must bear in mind that everything which befalls them comes from God. He lets sickness, poverty, persecution, etc., go as far as it pleases Him. He is in the background. He governs everything with His almighty arm. That is the Christians' consolation. Therefore they have no reason to doubt the love of God in their afflictions.

To suffer was also the lot of true believers in the Old Testament. The apostle shows it in the following words of our text: "As it is written: For Thy sake . . . the slaughter." These words are taken from Ps. 44, 22. There the psalmist speaks of the enemies that surrounded the children of Israel; they tried their very utmost to lead them away from God and to bring many evils upon them. He says: "For Thy sake we are killed all the day long." On account of confessing God, Jehovah, they were oppressed, continually exposed to hardships. The enemies cared no more for the life of the believers than for that of a sheep. Sheep are killed, not because they are hurtful while they live, but because they are useful when they are dead. For the same purpose the enemies killed the children of Israel, namely, to please themselves, to make them food for their malice. They were so cruel that the Lord Himself had to proclaim, Ps. 14, 4: "Have all the workers," etc.

The same is true in the New Testament. In the first three centuries of the Christian era, especially during the reign of Nero, the followers of Christ were cruelly persecuted. Some were cast into prison; some were tortured and whipped to death; others were coated with tar to be used as torches to illuminate gardens and roadsides for festivities. But notwithstanding these martyrs had to endure tribulations of all sorts, yet they did not doubt that God still loved them. They knew very well that they were called to endure afflictions. It was God's will.

Now, as all Christians, so also the deceased suffered afflictions. The days of her life were long and weary. The path of her life led not through pleasant groves and beside babbling brooks, but through a valley of darkness and a by-path of endurances. The cross she had to bear was an uncommonly heavy one. She suffered greatly.

Although she suffered so greatly, although she had to endure the excruciating pain of this dreadful disease for years, although she knew there was no more help to be had at the hand of human physicians, yet she did not doubt that God still loved her. She was positive that she would finally conquer.—How she and all the other saints did conquer will be the second point to which I desire to draw your attention.

2.

The apostle says: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." In these words the apostle clearly states that he and all true Christians are conquerors. Like a warrior who, after a hard struggle with his enemy on the battlefield, finally gains the victory, so, says Paul, he and all true Christians will conquer over all that is against them.

But had the apostle relied on his own strength and ability, he would not have conquered, on the contrary, he would have been over-

come by his enemies, he would have had to give up in despair. "For," says he, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood," etc., Eph. 6, 12. He was, as all the rest of mankind, flesh and blood, born in trespasses and sin. In his natural state he was too weak to meet his enemies successfully and to overcome all the obstacles thrown in his way. This he knew very well. But at the same time he knew that he was not alone. The very fact that he so boldly proclaimed that he would conquer shows that, although he was by nature in a deplorable condition, he knew some one else would make him a conqueror. And who was it? We read in our text: "We are conquerors through Him that loved us." And He that loved the apostle, and loves all men, is none other than God. He sent His only-begotten Son into this world to free us from sin, from the bondage of Satan, and from everlasting damnation. Christ did what we should have done. He perfectly fulfilled all commandments of God, "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us." This He did by becoming the most wretched and despised man on earth. He was mocked, ridiculed, oppressed, afflicted, and finally crucified upon Calvary, where He shed His precious blood for the remission of sin. By thus shedding His blood He atoned for the sins of the whole world.

This work of redemption St. Paul accepted in true faith. This Jesus, who had called the apostle from darkness to His marvelous light, and whom the apostle accepted in true faith, guided, defended, and supported him in his missionary work. Through Him alone St. Paul could boldly and confidently proclaim: "In all these things we are conquerors."

In the same manner as Paul, all Christians conquer. They accept Christ in true faith. They become one with God through faith in Christ Jesus. He is the connecting link. Being children of God through their Lord Jesus Christ, they can be positive that nothing is able to harm them, or to separate them from God's love, but that they shall conquer over all. For where Christ is, there they are secure.

But the apostle not only says that Christians are conquerors. He adds: "We are *more* than conquerors," that is, they are *triumphers*. Those are more than conquerors who conquer with *little loss*. Many conquests are dearly bought. But what do the suffering saints lose? Why, they lose what gold loses in the furnace — nothing but the dross. But those also are more than conquerors who conquer with *great gain*. The spoils of the sufferers are exceedingly rich: glory, honor, and peace, yea, a crown of righteousness that fades not away. In this the suffering saints have triumphed. They not only have not been separated from the love of Christ, but they have been

more closely connected with it. They overcame all torture, all pains, yea, the most horrible death, through Christ Jesus, who loved them. Those who went smiling to the stake, who stood singing in the flames, who said: "Welcome, the cross of Christ! Welcome, everlasting life!" were more than conquerors. The merit of Christ took the sting out of all their troubles. The Spirit of God strengthened them, enabling them to bear everything with holy courage and constancy. Thus we see, through Christ the Christians are able to do everything. He abides with them, even unto the end of the world. All they have to do is to strive for the victory and to divide the spoils.

This the apostle affirms in the last two verses of our text by giving a brief conclusion of the whole matter. With strongest confidence, expressed in the most powerful language, so as to set forth fully the absolute inability of all created things, separate or united, to frustrate the purpose of God, or to turn away His love from the true believers, he says: "I am persuaded . . . our Lord."

Thus it is evident, alone through Jesus Christ, our dear Savior, Paul and all saints were victorious. The same can be said of the deceased before us. God's love is universal. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. His will is that all should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. This the deceased knew very well, and she trusted in the Lord until she closed her eyes in death. Often did she say, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Because she believed in her Lord Jesus Christ, because she made such a good confession, we may be fully assured of her having been a conqueror.

O therefore do not mourn, ye who survive her! For now she is dwelling with the saints and her Lord in heavenly bliss. Her name is written in the Book of Life, awaiting the Judgment Day, when she shall go forth with a glorified body. Then she will be worthy of taking a place with the cherubim and seraphim round the throne of God, where she will bring praises to the Lamb that was slain for the redemption of the world. Well could she therefore proclaim with the apostle: "For me to die is gain."

May, then, dearly beloved, the departure of this beloved mother be another cord drawing us homeward and heavenward, fixing our hearts above where Christ is at the right hand of God the Father. But may we also always bear in mind that our loss is her gain, and that we, therefore, should not despair as others who are without hope in this world. We should rather strive, watch, and pray that we all may reach that blessed habitation where the deceased has gone. May God help us to attain that happy goal! Amen. P. E. Ross.
